DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 091 IR 058 685

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TITLE	Do Librarians Really Do That? Or Providing Custom, Fee-Based Services.
PUB DATE	2002-06-00
NOTE	7p.; In: SLA 2002: Putting Knowledge to Work. Papers Presented at the Special Libraries Association Conference (Los Angeles, California, June 9-12, 2002); see IR 058 674.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/2002annual/ confpap2002/papers2002conf.cfm/ .
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Competence ; Job Skills; *Librarians; *Library Services; Professional Development; *Special Libraries; Telephone Surveys; User Needs (Information); World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS	*Customer Services; National Institutes of Health

ABSTRACT

This paper describes some of the fee-based, custom services provided by National Institutes of Health (NIH) Library to NIH staff, including knowledge management, clinical liaisons, specialized database searching, bibliographic database development, Web resource guide development, and journal management. The first section discusses selecting the services, including a telephone survey of NIH Library users. The second section addresses custom service competencies, including traditional library skills, as well as the personal competencies mentioned in the Special Libraries Association "Competencies for Special Librarians." The third section presents three examples of custom service projects. The fourth section looks at future directions, including developing additional custom services, developing skills among staff that can facilitate the provision of custom services, and marketing these services more heavily to NIH staff. The "Custom Service Portfolio," containing brief descriptions of the services offered, is attached. (MES)

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Do Librarians Really Do That? Or Providing Custom, Fee-Based Services

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Increasingly, librarians are called upon to provide services such as web page development and knowledge management that are outside traditional library services and we must work to define these services, develop expertise in their delivery and market these services to users.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Library provides fee-based, custom services to the NIH staff in addition to the more traditional library services of the print and electronic collections, document delivery, information services, and instruction. While some of the custom services are outside the traditional library services, they do involve providing information or information management, and, in many cases, utilize skills already inherent in the staff such as database searching and development, reference service, web page design and development, and journal management.

The custom services that we offer currently include knowledge management, clinical liaisons, specialized database searching, bibliographic database development, web resource guide development, and journal management services (see the Custom Service Portfolio sidebar found below.)

SELECTING THE SERVICES

The decision to choose these particular services as custom services was based on several factors including customer requests and survey results.

Over the past few years we have had a number of customers who have asked for services that were extensions of basic services but were somewhat out of scope of what we were currently providing. We tried to accommodate these requests but were always concerned about the uneven allocation of resources to NIH staff. Out of a concern about depleting our resources, we placed some limits on what we could provide. We wanted to provide these services, but needed a mechanism with which to do this. In 2001, a new cost recovery business model, based on demand for service, replaced the previous incremental base budget model, and this new model provided us with the needed mechanism.

To gain a better understanding of the types of specialized services NIH groups or individual researchers might want us to provide, we conducted a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected NIH Library users in 2000 and included questions about potential custom services. As part of this survey we asked our customers if they would find it beneficial to have a librarian who could develop a bibliographic database or a web resource page. The results were favorable. To the question of "how beneficial to you would it be to have a librarian design and construct a customized web page tailored to your specific research" the responses were 45.5%

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very beneficial, 30.8% somewhat beneficial, 11.8% not too beneficial, 20.8% not at all beneficial, and 1.2% no response. To the question of "how beneficial to you would it be to have a librarian design and develop a database organizing collections of articles documents or other items for easy retrieval" the responses were 49.8% very beneficial, 29.5% somewhat beneficial, 7.2% not too beneficial, 12.8% not at all beneficial, and 0.8% no response. With over 40% of the interviewees responding that the service would be very beneficial, we felt there would be a sizable group who would be interested in these services, and, therefore, decided to provide them.

During the past two years we have been cautious in the promotion of custom services among NIH staff. While we have many mechanisms to use to advertise our services, including a web site, listservs, newsletters, and an electronic bulletin board, we are not staffed to be able to provide a large number of these services all at once, and instead are concentrating on building our reputation and the number of custom service projects we undertake over time.

CUSTOM SERVICE COMPETENCIES

In many cases, the skills needed to provide custom services are traditional library skills of identifying, organizing, managing, and training others to use information. Specifically, most of our custom services use the more traditional reference, database searching, instruction, journal ordering and management, use of bibliographic database management software, and thesaurus development skills as well as newer skills such as design and construction of web pages, usability testing, and knowledge management.

A number of these skills are specifically mentioned in the Special Libraries Association "Competencies for Special Librarians" [5]. In particular the personal competencies of "seeks out challenges and sees new opportunities both inside and outside the library," "sees the big picture," "has personal business skills and creates new opportunities, and "is flexible and positive in a time of continuing change" are particularly important in the ability to analyze customer's requests for service and envision how the library can provide that service.

In addition, the competency of "is committed to lifelong learning and personal career planning" is essential to the willingness to build upon current skills or apply current skills in entirely new settings or in new arenas.

EXAMPLES OF CUSTOM SERVICE PROJECTS

During 2001 we completed eleven custom service projects and our goal is to complete 30 such projects a year by 2003. Following are three examples of custom service projects.

The Office of Medical Applications of Research (OMAR) asked us to search for references to the consensus development reports that they produce as these reports are often republished in journals, and to see how often the reports are cited in the literature. Given the number of reports that have been published and the difficulty in cited reference searching for this type of publication, this was a fairly extensive project. The results of the project have been included on the OMAR web site (http://odp.od.nih.gov/consensus/) on individual consensus statement pages as the "List of Publications Related to this Consensus Conference".

The National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) asked us to search for web sites that would be of use to their extramural grants staff and place bookmarks or favorites on the computer in their off-campus journal reading room. Instead, we proposed developing a web page that would serve as a focal point for access to frequently used research tools, including genome databases and online journals, as well as Internet sites with breaking news, listservs and statistical resources relevant to the work of NIAID researchers. We felt this web page would be more useful to them as it could be used by all staff from their desktop computers and would be easy for us to keep up-to-date remotely. You can view this customized web site at http://nihlibrary.nih.gov/niaid/niaid.html. We add new information monthly to these pages.

The Office of Research Services (ORS), of which the NIH Library is a part, asked us to undertake a knowledge management project that would help them organize and disseminate information relevant to ORS management operations. We are currently working with their staff to design and develop an Information Management System that will provide a mechanism whereby the ORS management staff may effectively store and organize information that comes into the Deputy Director's office from the various ORS offices and divisions, as well as enable effective dissemination of information to its offices and divisions. This project includes conducting an information audit, developing a prototype web-based Information Management System, and conducting usability tests.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Currently, we are working to pursue activities in the areas of developing additional custom services, developing skills among staff that can facilitate the provision of custom services, and marketing these services more heavily to NIH staff.

First, we plan to further identify custom service needs within our customer base and initiate consulting opportunities where appropriate. Currently we are working with NIH clinical staff to expand the role of clinical liaisons to informationists [1-4] who will work collaboratively as an integral part of both research and clinical care teams at NIH providing specialized expertise in information management that contributes to research and clinical situations.

Second, we plan to continue developing new skills related to the provision of information particularly in the areas of knowledge management, usability testing, and the new role of the informationist. Informationists need strong skills in not only information services, but also biomedicine, bioinformatics, and biostatistics. We are developing a training program to ensure that they possess the appropriate skills.

Lastly, we will continue to develop marketing strategies in order to promote these new and innovative services to specific target groups within the NIH community, as well as perform continuous evaluation of these services to ensure that we are providing quality, professional services that satisfy our customers' needs.

CONCLUSION

By providing personalized information services in response to our customers' needs, we have been able to recognize and initiate consultation opportunities and provide creative and innovative solutions to groups that we may not have otherwise served.

As one of the strategic goals of the Library is to provide "customized information services and transparent access to the most relevant information for its users", we believe we have not only succeeded in fulfilling this goal, but have also raised the visibility of the Library and the kinds of professional information services we can provide to our customers. In particular, we have raised awareness that librarians act as information consultants to NIH groups and collaborate on special projects that require a high degree of professional information skills. We feel this also contributes to a positive image for the Library's provision of basic services as well.

Finally, in addition to the benefits that can be seen for our customers in terms of receiving quality custom services, we are also able to see tangible benefits for the staff of the Library as well. Through the provision of personalized information services, librarians have been able to explore creative and innovative methods and technologies and develop new roles they may not have otherwise developed. We believe these new roles ultimately promote a greater sense of professionalism and job satisfaction among the professional library staff.

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CUSTOM SERVICE PORTFOLIO

Knowledge Management Services - Professional analysis, identification, and organization of knowledge assets to enhance achievement of organizational objectives

NIH Librarians currently provide knowledge management services to NIH researchers by working closely with a work group to help identify and manage its knowledge base in order to advance the collective knowledge of its staff with the goal of enhancing the research efforts of NIH scientists. Librarians give assistance with designing organizing and developing web-based information management systems that serve as a repository for the work group's communications, documents and links to relevant web resources. Librarians specifically conduct information audits, develop taxonomies, design site architectures, develop prototypes and conduct usability tests as part of delivering knowledge management services.

Clinical Liaison Services - dedicated professional searching, value-added information delivery, and training services for NIH patient-care teams

The NIH Library maintains an active program of Clinical Liaison Services to the clinical units within the NIH Magnuson Clinical Center and associated labs. As a part of this service, clinical librarians attend clinical rounds and participate as members of a unit's patient care team by performing literature searches on topics relevant to patient care issues and/or clinical research programs. Utilizing quality-filtering techniques, clinical liaisons are able to retrieve highly relevant and authoritative information, thus saving the clinician countless hours of perusing the literature, and allowing the clinician more time to devote to his/her clinical practice or research activities. By participating as a member of a unit's patient care team, attending staff meetings, and/or attending journal club meetings, the clinical liaison is uniquely qualified and available to understand and meet the unit's information needs. The liaison also provides specialized training that is tailored to the interests of each group.

Specialized Database Searching Services - extensive database searching and consultation for special projects

NIH librarians work directly with NIH researchers by providing consultation on choosing appropriate database resources, developing search strategies, as well as providing in-depth, quality-filtered search results. Librarians download search results into databases using a reference management package such as EndNote and Reference Manager. These reference databases can be shared by your department - eliminating redundant resources that may be scattered throughout a department - saving the work group time and money. As a part of this service, librarians also offer training on how to use reference management software.

Bibliographic Database Development - customized databases that organize article, document, and other collections for easy retrieval

NIH Librarians provide consultation in designing and developing databases that organize collections of articles, documents or other items for easy retrieval. Librarians also conduct literature searches, filter search results and download citations into a bibliographic management package such as EndNote, Reference Manager or Procite.

Web Resource Guides Development - provides access to professionally evaluated and organized web-based research tools and resources

This service specializes in the design of web guides that provide access to web-based research tools and resources that are evaluated and indexed by NIH librarians to specifically meet the information research needs of your group. A customized web site can enhance your group's access to information by serving as a one-stop solution for your unique information needs.

Journal Management Services - simplified journal ordering and tracking that maximizes staff's efforts and minimizes their learning curve

The NIH Library offers comprehensive services designed to reduce the cost of maintaining journal collections for individual NIH offices or departments who may be seeking an alternative in in-house management of its collections. These services include simplified journal ordering services using the NIH Library's current contract with a commercial subscription service. Other collection management services include using its journal tracking system to order, receive, and claim journal issues for you. Journal records are created in the NIH Library Online Catalog and are displayed separately in order to make it easier to check on the arrival status of specific issues. A messenger service provides delivery of subscription journals.

In addition to journal ordering and tracking services, the Library also provides binding services, including the preparation of issues for shipment and processing the returned shipment of bound volumes from the commercial binder, as well as library technician services to deliver document delivery items and maintain the journal collection.

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